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ABSTRACT

The morale of kindergarten teachers was investigated to determine the validity of the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (PTO) and whether teachers' morale scores would be related to their students' self-concept scores, as measured by the Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Social Competencies (KIDSc). Teacher morale on the PTO consists of 10 factors: (1) teacher rapport with the principal; (2) satisfaction with teaching; (3) rapport among teachers; (4) teacher salary; (5) teacher load; (6) curriculum issues; (7) teacher status; (8) community support of education; (9) school facilities and services; and (10) community pressures. The opinionaire was mailed to all 1,347 kindergarten teachers in Mississippi who taught during the 1986-87 year; a total of 1,058 opinionaires were returned, 151 of which were from teachers whose students had previously completed the KIDSc. The means of the scores of the kindergarten teachers were located at the fiftieth percentile and higher on factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. On the fifth factor, "teacher load," the mean fell to the twenty-fifth percentile. The variable "teacher load," consists of concerns related to "red tape," extra curriculum load, record-keeping, and clerical work. A total of 81 percent of the teachers reported that they loved to teach, despite being overloaded. All correlations between teachers' morale levels and students' self-concept scores were negative and not significant. (RH)

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A CORRELATION STUDY OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' MORALE WITH KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS' FEELINGS ABOUT SCHOOL

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The drive of educational reform movements from across the nation has helped to make early childhood education an acceptable component of most public school systems. Although America's children can and will benefit from appropriate early school experiences, there are concerns that problems arising out of the rapid expansion of programs for young children might counteract the many benefits that "good schools for young children" should be providing.

For instance, teachers have reported that they feel pressured to teach by inappropriate methods to ensure that their young students do well on paper-and-pencil tests (Hitz and Wright, 1988). Other teachers agree, as evidenced by the following letter, that heavy teaching load, hours required to prepare child-centered environments, lack of school funds to purchase materials, excessive paper work, and other school related issues could lead to the early retirement of many early childhood educators.

"... I have been somewhat distressed this year about the attitude of most of my fellow kindergarten teachers in this school district. They are so frustrated and the term "burned-out" is used very often..." (Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation Project files, 1988).

When considering the mounting information that suggests early childhood teachers are dissatisfied in their teaching positions, another question arises. If kindergarten teachers are unhappy in their job situations, does this attitude effect how their students feel about self in relationship to the school experience?

Purpose of the Study

To explore the proposed questions, the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation Center (ECCE) conducted a statewide survey. The purpose of the study was to investigate

kindergarten teachers' morale and to attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Which factors on the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (PTO) (Bentley & Rempel, 1980) yield significant information concerning the level of morale among the kindergarten teachers?
2. Can a relationship be identified between the teachers' morale scores and their students' self-concept scores as measured by the the Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Social Competencies (KIDSc) (Correro, G. C., Shaklee, B. D., Turner, J.T., Handley, H., Ruthven, J., George, A., Howard, E., 1987)?

Materials and Methods

In a separate study, 20 school districts in Mississippi were randomly selected to participate in a state-wide evaluation plan in August, 1986. These school districts administered the KIDSc instrument to their kindergarten students in October and April of the 1986-87 school year. The KIDSc test was designed to provide a procedure for assessing several factors of self-concept which are related to the kindergarten classroom. The results of this research project were compiled by the Mississippi State University ECCE Center and presented to the Mississippi State Department of Education (Correro & Howard, 1987) in July, 1987.

According to the results from the Epistat statistical program, there was a significant difference in the frequencies of students moving from lower self-concept scores to higher self-concept scores from pretest to posttest administrations (Table 1). The significant increase in frequencies from lower to higher self-concept scores suggested that these kindergarten students did improve their competence in dealing with emotional feelings and social situations in relation to the school environment.

In May, 1987, the PTO was mailed to all of the 1,347 kindergarten teachers in Mississippi who taught during the 1986-87 year. In August, 1987, a second mailing was sent to those teachers who had not responded to the first mail-out. By October, 1987, 1,058 opinionaires had been returned and were scanned at the MSU Institutional Research Center.

The PTO is designed to yield a measure of teacher morale by providing specific information to school administrators about crucial problems which concern the faculty and could have an adverse effect on their job performance. In this process, the opinionaire yields meaningful sub-scores which break down morale into ten factors.

1. Teacher Rapport with Principal
2. Satisfaction with Teaching
3. Rapport Among Teachers
4. Teacher Salary
5. Teacher Load
6. Curriculum Issues
7. Teacher Status
8. Community Support of Education
9. School Faculties and Services
10. Community Pressures

Of the 1,347 teachers who taught during the 1986-87 school year, 199 were involved in the KIDSc project. Through the use of identification numbers, 151 of the 199 teachers were identified as having returned the PTO.

Methods of Data Analysis

To determine the level of morale among the kindergarten teachers, medians for factor items and means for factor totals were computed from all of the opinionaires returned. Medians and means of the Mississippi

teachers were then compared to the PTO normative sample.

Following the evaluation of the returned Purdue Teacher Opinionaires, each teacher's PTO score was correlated with each student's KIDSc score. Correlation coefficients were computed to investigate the relationship between teachers' morale and their students' attitudes about self and school.

Results of the Study

Level of Morale

The means of the scores of the kindergarten teachers who responded on the PTO rated at the 50th percentile and higher on Factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 (Figure 1).

1. Teacher Rapport with Principal
2. Satisfaction with Teaching
3. Rapport Among Teachers
4. Teacher Salary
6. Curriculum Issues
7. Teacher Status
8. Community Support of Education
9. School Facilities and Services
10. Community Pressures

However, on Factor 5, "Teacher Load," the teachers' mean ranked at the 25th percentile when compared to the normative sample (Figure 1). Factor 5 is made up of concerns related to "red tape," extra curricular load, record-keeping, and clerical work. As shown in Figure 2, the items on which the teachers' median rated at approximately the 25th percentile were 1, 6, 10, 14, and 45.

1. Details, "red-tape," and required reports absorb too much of my time.

6. Teachers in this school are expected to do an unreasonable amount of record-keeping and clerical work.

10. My teaching load is greater than that of most of the other teachers in our school.

14. The number of hours a teacher must work is unreasonable.

45. My heavy teaching load unduly restricts my professional activities.

Closer examination of each factor's items revealed that Factor 2 had an unusually high number of items that rated at the 90th percentile (Figure 3). These items were 26, 46, 82, and 86.

26. I love to teach.

46. I find my contacts with students, for the most part, highly rewarding.

82. My students appreciate the help I give them with their school work.

86. As a teacher, I think I am as competent as most other teachers.

Relationship Between Teachers' Morale and Students' Self-Concepts

Table 2 displays the obtained correlation coefficients of the individual teacher's scores for each factor with each child's KIDSc score. All coefficients were negative and were not significant.

Conclusions

According to Bentley & Rempel (1980), the authors of the PTO, there is no assurance that the normative populations of the PTO are representative of the population of all teachers for whom the PTO is appropriate. Even though the normative sample is representative of a sizable population from wide geographical and faculty size distributions, interpretations of these results must be made carefully.

One cannot be sure that the low or high percentile rankings by Mississippi kindergarten teachers as compared to the normative sample is an absolute indication of a low or high level of morale among the Mississippi kindergarten teachers. However, when examining the percentages of teachers who responded with the same answers on individual items, more value can be placed on the results.

In light of these considerations, the following conclusions are submitted:

1. The level of morale among Mississippi kindergarten teachers is about average to above average as compared to the normative sample on issues pertaining to rapport with principal, satisfaction with teaching, rapport among teachers, teacher salary, curriculum issues, teacher status, community support, school facilities and services, and community pressures.
2. The level of morale among Mississippi teachers concerning teacher load (25th percentile) is low as compared to the normative group. Mississippi teachers were and are continuing to face an enormous amount of paperwork. Eighty-one percent of the teachers agreed and probably agreed that details, "red tape," and required reports absorb too much of their time (Factor 5, Item 1). This large percentage indicates that these teachers view this item as one problem in their school districts. The norm percentile ranking (25th) and the large percentage of teachers who agreed and probably agreed (81%) reflect a consistency on this factor between these teachers and the normative sample.
3. Even though the rating of the mean for Factor 2, "Satisfaction with Teaching," was only slightly above the 50th percentile, 86% of the Mississippi kindergarten teachers reported that

they loved to teach. Eighty percent of the teachers answered that the stress and strain of teaching did not make teaching undesirable for them. Dispite the fact that 81% of the teachers expressed their dissatisfaction concerning their teacher load, the majority of the kindergarten teachers find pleasure in their chosen profession.

4. Even though authorities agree that problems and tensions in a job situation can effect the employee's morale and subsequently his performance, no relationship could be identified between teacher morale and student self-concept in this study.

Summary

During the 1986-87 school year, numerous letters were received at the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Curriculum Evaluation Center and various conversations were held with teachers and principals from across Mississippi concerning the multitude of problems in the newly established, statewide kindergarten program. Consequently, the perception was that a large percentage of early childhood teachers in Mississippi's kindergarten classrooms would indicate high levels of dissatisfaction on all factors of the PTO.

However, this was not the case. Perhaps letters were only written about the negative situations, and the good news too often went unreported. The kindergarten teachers in this study scored, as a whole, in the average range on the morale continuum. This indicates that conditions are not as severe as first thought, but rather there is a balance throughout the state between teachers who are pleased in their positions and those who feel their school situations need to be improved.

The low morale score on Factor 5, "Teacher Load," was expected.

Mississippi kindergarten teachers have been overloaded in their work. Writing and rewriting the Mississippi Curriculum Structure (MCS) (Mississippi State Department of Education, 1987), writing and rewriting the Instruction Management Plan (IMP) (a plan of instruction based on objectives) based on the the MCS, writing daily lessons based on the IMP, and making learning center activities have required hours of the teachers' time at school and at home. "Burn-out" is a problem that is being addressed in Mississippi, and the ratings on this factor do substantiate the negative attitudes that were expressed through letters and conversations from numerous Mississippi teachers.

As for the good news, a large perentage (81%) of the teachers reported that they love to teach, despite the overload situation. What a statement this makes about Mississippi's early childhood professionals! Regardless of the problems that exist in education today, such as the pressure to force kindergarten curriculum planning into formats designed for higher grade levels in an effort to improve tests scores, these teachers are working with five- and six-year olds because this is what they really want to do.

Studies such as this one need to be conducted in order to verify preconceived notions concerning problems and attitudes of teachers. As a result of the work of the MSU ECCE project and many other Mississippi advocates for young children, progress is continuously being made in Mississippi to improve early school opportunities for five- and six-year olds. Some of the progressive steps that have been made during the 1988-89 year are:

1. There will be no more statewide standardized testing of kindergarten students after the 1988-89 school year (Gold, 1988).

2. A project is being developed to provide workshops for school districts on appropriate evaluation techniques to be used with young children (Correro, 1988).
3. Kindergarten in Mississippi, as of the 1988-89 school year, is now funded under the minimum foundation plan. This secures the program as a permanent component of the public school system.
4. A curriculum plan, The Kindergarten Guide for Instructional Planning (Leigh, 1988), has been written for kindergarten teachers. Workshops are being conducted in ten locations in the state explaining to teachers how to use the new curriculum along with the Implementing Kindergarten in Mississippi Teachers Resource Book (Mississippi State Department of Education, 1985).
5. A module of instruction has been written for administrators on how to implement an integrated curriculum in grades K-3. The module, Establishing Developmental Concepts in Primary Grades, is offered through the Mississippi State Department of Education free of charge as a course for administrators to take to upgrade their certification status (Grace, 1988).
6. The Guidelines for Kindergarten (Mississippi State Department of Education, 1985) that were adopted by the state when the kindergarten program was implemented in 1985, have now been added to the Mississippi Performance-Based Accreditation Standards (Mississippi State Department of Education, 1988). This ensures that when schools are evaluated for the purpose of state accreditation, the evaluators will have appropriate guidelines to use when visiting the kindergarten classrooms.

Within this state, there is much work to be done. However, Mississippi is definitely attempting to address the problems and move

forward for the good of its young students. So many good things can be said about the progress that has been made in this state, but the aspect that we should be most proud of today is the dedication and commitment of our kindergarten teachers.

Table 1

Changes in Frequencies of Students in High, Adequate, and Low Self-Concept Groups from Pretest to Posttest

Group	Pretest N	Pretest %	Posttest N	Posttest %	df	X^2
High Self-Concept	780	16.7	1671	37.4	1	166.37*
Adequate Self-Concept	2597	55.7	2073	46.4	1	29.27*
Low Self-Concept	1282	27.5	728	16.3	1	77.26*

* $\leq$ .001

Table 2

Correlation of Students Self-Concept Scores With Teachers' Morale Scores

Factor 1	-0.07344
Factor 2	-0.08230
Factor 3	-0.02678
Factor 4	-0.02098
Factor 5	-0.01644
Factor 6	-0.06008
Factor 7	-0.08019
Factor 8	-0.08097
Factor 9	-0.07027
Factor 10	-0.01269

Figure 1

Comparison of Mississippi Ratings With Normative Sample on the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire.

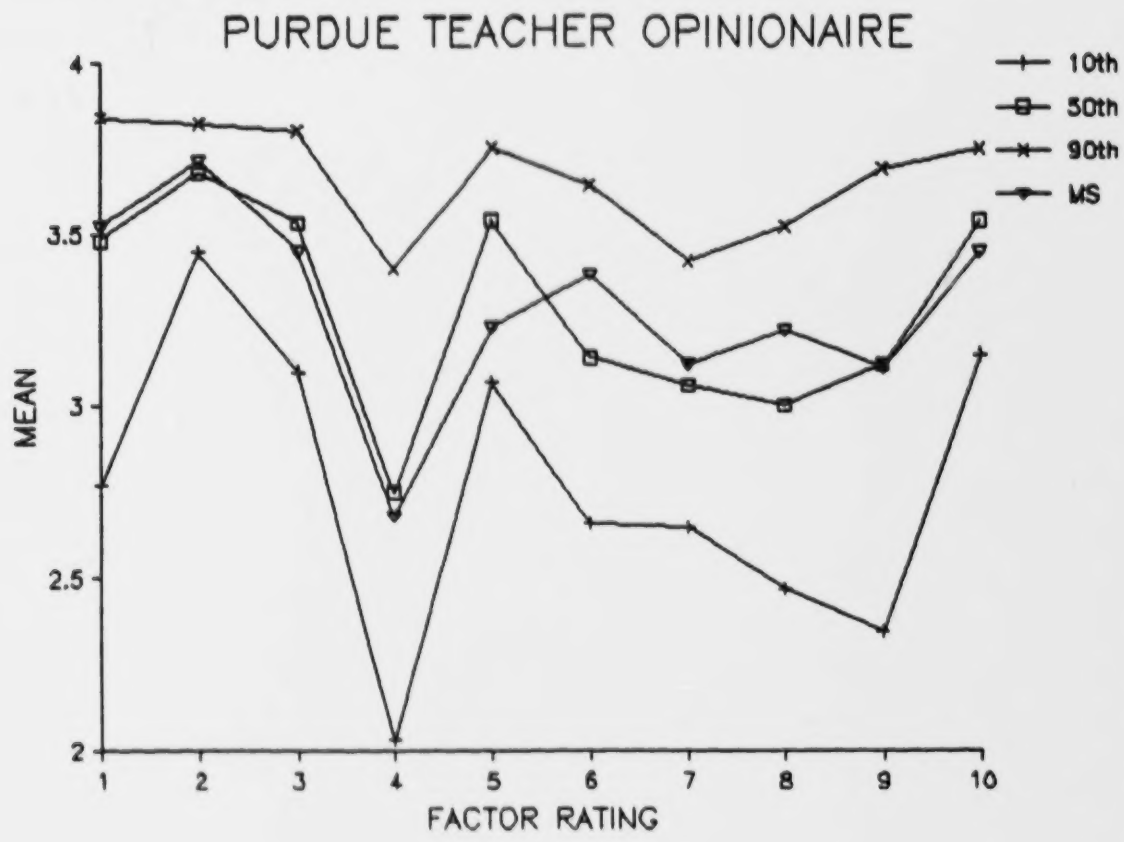


Figure 2

Comparison of Mississippi Ratings With Normative Sample on the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire.

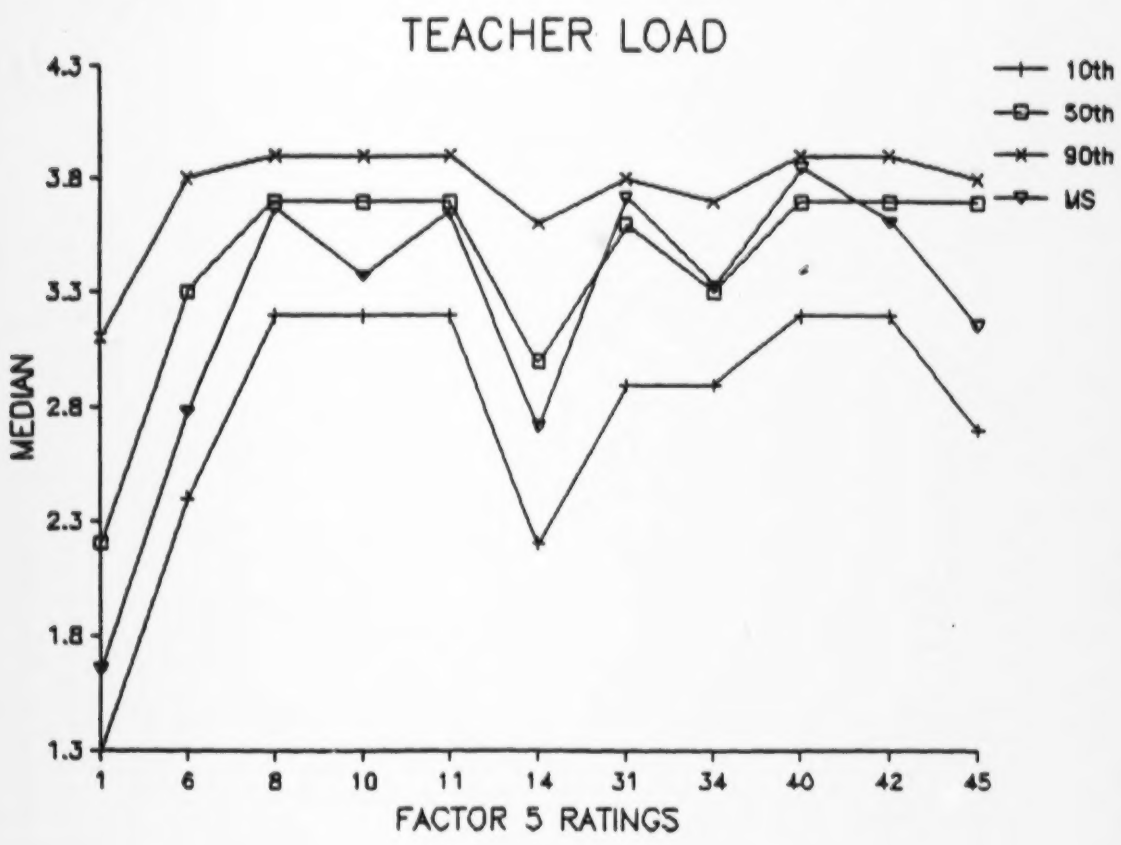
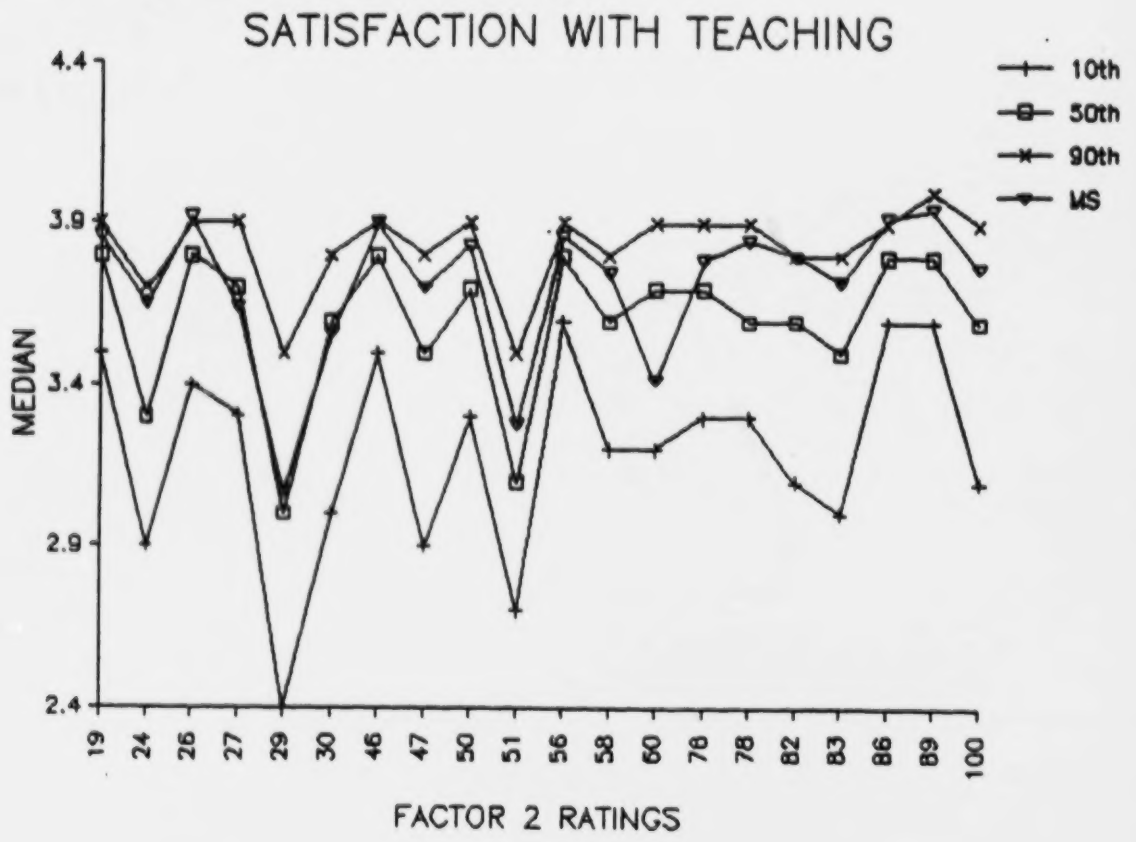


Figure 3

Comparison of Mississippi Ratings With Normative Sample on the Purdue Teacher Opinionaire.



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